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ABSTRACT

Viewing standards from the perspective of classroom teachers, this book discusses the need to alter middle school culture to facilitate meaningful improvements in the teaching-learning environment. It emphasizes efforts by middle grades educators to make schools and classrooms places where more students work harder to do work of higher quality more of the time. Section 1, "Introduction," introduces the issue. Section 2, "If 'Standards' Are the Solution, What Are the Problems?" discusses the political context of the standards movement and examines standardized testing, grade retention, and bureaucratic accountability. Section 3, "Building a Culture of High Standards: Turning Rhetoric into Practice," discusses three essential building blocks: a focus on student work supported by a rich instructional program, a motivational climate for high standards, and a collegial community for professional practice and accountability. Section 4, "What Districts and States Can Do To Promote a Culture of High Standards in Every School," discusses such issues as: sending clear messages; promoting cross-program collaboration around curriculum innovation; nurturing principals as instructional leaders; helping schools reschedule to make time for professional learning; supporting teacher networks and study groups; convening teachers system-wide to develop rubrics and identify exemplars; identifying resources to match reform goals; developing public support; and charting new territory. Section 5, "Conclusion," wraps up the report. (Contains approximately 160 references.) (SM)

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